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## THE ROUND TABLE

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### A BETTER ENGLISH WEEK

Our "Better English Week" was suggested by the head of the English department, who recognized in a movement of this kind an opportunity to bring into the daily routine of school life the freshness of vision which comes to him who knows the joy, however brief it may be, of adequate self-expression. The teachers of the English department, realizing that this week of concentrated effort on the part of all the high schools could do much to make the student at least conscious of his errors and of the general ineffectiveness of his speech, heartily indorsed the movement and presented a recommendation to that effect to the principal, who presented the matter at the general teachers' meeting.

Here the first great difficulty presented itself, that of securing the co-operation of the general body of teachers not directly interested in the English needs of the students. In general they expressed themselves as being in favor of an effort to improve the quality of the recitations, but there was some resentment evident toward the English department for implying a criticism of the existing standards for expression in classrooms other than English, and also a disposition to interpret the actions of the English department as self-exploiting. I speak of these things merely because I think they are typical of the initial difficulty of proposing a drive of this kind in most high schools, but I believe that a thoughtful method of procedure will eliminate these misunderstandings. Perhaps the name "Speech Improvement Week," which is used by some of the eastern high schools, would be less odious, although it would not include some of the lines of endeavor which we tried to encourage by our Better English Week. I believe, too, that where it is possible the movement should arise from members of the teaching force other than those teaching English, and that those chosen to carry it on be as little identified with English teaching as possible, for the efficiency of the work depends very largely on the fact that the pressure is brought to bear from a variety of angles. The committee selected in our school consisted of five persons, representing respectively the English, history, language, commercial, and manual arts departments. The science department was not represented merely because the teachers were all engaged at that time in some other committee work.

The committee of five worked out its plans in the form of a report, which was accepted by the teachers as a whole. The actual work and responsibility for the success of the enterprise were shared by all of the teachers as members of the various committees. Groups of students also were given committee work.

The chief phases of the work may be divided into a few sections: the classroom efforts to secure the use of better English, the activities associated with attracting the attention and interest of the students as well as of the public, and the special features of the week's campaign.

In connection with the first of these, the intramural activities (shall I say ?) of our week, the committee thought that it was the psychological moment to propose a standardization of requirements in English work, both oral and written, to be made permanent for the high school. This recommendation was accepted and a committee appointed to formulate a set of principles to be observed by teacher and pupil. After several lively sessions over the report of this committee, which only served to reveal the necessity for establishing a uniform practice, a statement of requirements is gradually evolving. A copy will be put into the hands of every student in the school.

The chief problem in working out the program for the use of better English in all classrooms was that of securing the active co-operation of all teachers, but a splendid enthusiasm was evident in the reports handed in to the publicity committee. These indicated carefully mapped-out plans of campaign on the part of the teachers and a lively response on the part of the pupils to the appeal made by the various departments for greater clearness and correctness of expression in recitations. Such appeals often prove more convincing than the oft-repeated one of the English classroom.

In various ways, attention was called to clear and logical arrangement of thought in the recitation, proper introduction and completeness of statement, correct answering of questions and definition of terms, as well as drills in the spelling and pronunciation of the technical terms of each subject. Spelling matches were conducted in several classes—in history, science, mathematics, and other subjects. In one science class a clever bit of dramatization resulted from a dialogue between Pope Urban VIII and Galileo on the inventions of the latter. In a chemistry class a debate was held: "Resolved: That the title of the text be changed from 'The Chemistry of Common Things' to 'The Chemistry of Uncommon Things.'" In Latin classes special attention was given to articulation, use of good English in translation, choice of synonyms in translation,

and the compiling of a list of Latin derivatives used during the week. In the sewing class chosen members explained in detail the method of making over an old garment into a new one, the remaining members of the class acting as critics, not of the method, but of the English used. In the cooking classes a similar method of class work was employed in a demonstration of the making and baking of cookies; again the question was not, "Are the Cookies Good?" but, "What about the English?" In some classes stress was laid on enunciation and the elementary sounds of the language. In the pedagogy class, games for children, to establish the use of the language, were used. In all classes discussions of idioms and their abuse were given free rein, and in many secretaries were appointed to note the common errors. In one class a trial was held on the basis of these charges. Pupils were also encouraged to enlarge and enrich vocabularies by means of special studies made of words and the use of the dictionary in acquiring words. In an advanced class in literature the pupils were given a few simple rules for finding expressive words that flash images through the reader's mind, and they were then set to work to find words which they later embodied in verses. But a recital of all the devices used would only be tedious to readers who have perhaps worked out many such.

To aid in keeping the "Better English" idea before the minds of the students, various plans for publicity were adopted. Placards were prepared, bearing such statements as: "Better say: *He doesn't*"; "Better say: It is *he*"; "Better say: I *did* it"; "Better say: *Lend* me a pencil," and so on through all the important and commonly abused idioms. The work of printing these fifty or more signs was done by boys in the mechanical-drawing department, who shared in this way the work of conducting the "drive." They also prepared sets of "Ten Commandments for Good English." These placards, which were placed in conspicuous places throughout the corridors and study halls, were the occasion of no inconsiderable comment on the part of the students. A student committee planned some clever slogans which were placed on the blackboards of the different classrooms, each one appropriate to the subject taught in that room, as: "Every seed, every animal, has its use; so has every word in the English language." "Latin helps your English; so with Better English Week. Study up on articulation."

On one bulletin board appeared the question, printed by a student, "Where do we need good English?" Beneath it were posted pictures of factories, offices, homes, stores, etc. The question "Who needs better English?" was answered by pictures of workmen, mechanics,

doctors, lawyers, nurses, merchants, etc. A very notable feature of the week was the posters made by pupils gifted in art. One especially good cartoon represented a large English book with bulging back that resembled a tower. Around this and upon it numerous little men busied themselves, some sawing cobwebs or breaking them with an axe, some on a scaffold rubbing and polishing, others sweeping clouds of dust from the top. The lines read, "Brush up on your English."

To expose, as it were, the students to sources of information on correctness in speech, a special committee of faculty and students prepared an exhibit of books and magazines, such as "Words Often Mispronounced," "Correct English and How to Use It," books of synonyms, books of idioms, and dictionaries of all kinds. The public library co-operated in this work. The librarian offered us all the available material and prepared a valuable poster to accompany the exhibit, indicating the special uses of the different dictionaries.

By far the most important work in publicity, however, was that which a special committee accomplished in bringing the idea of using better English before the people outside of the school. The newspapers of the city gave generous space to the committee's well-written articles describing in detail what was going on in the high school during the week. The editors of the two city papers joined in the movement to improve the speech consciousness of the community and wrote editorials commending "Better English Week."

In addition to these activities the committee in charge planned three special features of the week—a Monday morning assembly devoted to better English, an essay contest, and a pronunciation contest.

At the Monday morning assembly of all students two splendid speeches by citizens of the city gave the work of the week an enthusiastic start. A newspaper man, who has distinguished himself in a literary way, spoke from the business standpoint on the value of good English in business life. Then a woman, a native of England and a person of remarkable attainments, presented in a very pithy and entertaining way the sources of effectiveness in the use of the English tongue.

The students who entered the essay contest were divided into two groups, Freshman-Sophomore and Junior-Senior. A typewritten list of a hundred subjects, compiled by the various departments, was posted in each room along with the rules of the contest. A faculty committee chose from the essays submitted a limited number of the best, which were then judged by a professional man competent to judge the work. Awards were given to the winners in each group, and

the essays were published, one in the high-school paper, the other in a magazine published by the class in elective English.

The pronunciation contest proved a difficult venture because no precedent could be found for a contest of just the nature proposed, but it worked out in spite of difficulties. A list of five hundred words frequently mispronounced was published in the newspaper in order to give the contestants an opportunity to study the pronunciation. A student committee prepared a list of about a hundred contestants, who worked hard and argued at length on the pronunciation of the words in the list. The contest was held on Friday evening in the school auditorium and the public was invited, a nominal admission being charged to defray the slight expenses of the week. The words were thrown, one at a time, on the screen, and each contestant, in his turn, pronounced. The city superintendent of schools, who makes pronunciation of words a very special study, acted as judge, deciding whether a correct pronunciation had been given. When a contestant pronounced incorrectly he forfeited his place. The one who remained standing after the rest were eliminated was pronounced winner and awarded the trophy. The words were thrown on the screen from a reflectoscope on the stereopticon machine. They had been written in rather large handwriting across a roll of adding-machine paper, which was pulled through a lead frame fastened on the reflectoscope. Other methods proved too expensive or impracticable. It is surprising to learn how many persons are interested in the pronunciation of words, and it is a gratification to hear the busy men and women in the stores and shops and on the streets discussing the pronunciation of words brought to their attention in this way.

On the whole our "Better English Week" produced a reaction on the students and on many business and professional men and public-spirited women of the city who took the time to send in to the high school words of commendation for the "Better English Week." Because we feel encouraged by these tangible results, and because we hope that there have been other effects, invisible but rooted somewhere in the consciousness of our school and community, we believe in the "Better English Week" and hope to make it an institution in our high school.

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